

her experience as a Governor who's managed crises before, who's worked on public health issues since she's been in public life, she is the right person at the right time for the job.

So congratulations. We are thrilled, and you are going to do a great job.

Secretary Sebelius. Thank you, sir. Honored to serve.

The President. Thank you.

Remarks on Senator Arlen Specter's Decision to Join the Senate Democratic Caucus

April 29, 2009

The President. Good morning, everybody.

Vice President Joe Biden. Mr. President, as we used to say in the Senate, I hope you'll excuse a point of personal privilege here. Arlen Specter has been my friend and my confidant and my partner, and I his partner, in scores and scores of major, major pieces of legislation and issues for a long time. And beyond that, Mr. President, he's been there for me every time things have been tough for me, and I hope I have been there for him.

And it gives me great pleasure, great pleasure, Mr. President, to now officially be in the same caucus with Arlen Specter. We've ridden the train for so many years, we've visited each other's homes, our families, that it's just, as, again, a point of personal privilege, it's just a delight to have no separation.

[At this point, Vice President Biden made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

So, Mr. President, I am pleased to introduce a man of immense personal courage and unmatched integrity, my friend, Arlen Specter.

Sen. Arlen Specter. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, and thank you, Mr. President, for your support and encouragement.

I was unwilling to subject my 29-year record in the United States Senate to the Pennsylvania Republican primary electorate, but I am pleased to run in the primary on the Democratic ticket and am ready, willing, and anxious to take on all comers in a general election.

All right, thanks, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:02 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard E. Besser, Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 29.

I have not represented the Republican Party; I have represented the people of Pennsylvania. And I will continue to do just that. As I said yesterday, I will not be an automatic 60th vote. There have been positions, which I talked about yesterday and will not reenumerate, where I stand in a different position from the traditional position of the Democrats, and I will continue that independence.

[Sen. Specter made brief remarks, concluding as follows.]

When I talked to the President yesterday, I said, "I haven't seen you in the elevator lately." His office used to be right down the hall from mine on the seventh floor of the Hart Building, and he hadn't come back lately, so I said I was calling him up just to chit-chat. And I got to know the President to some extent in the Senate. I talked too long already, but that's—Joe taught me how to do that.

Just one personal comment: The President approached me when he was Senator Obama, before the Democratic primary. And he said, "Tell me, Arlen, if a Jewish kid from Kansas can carry Pennsylvania, how can a black kid from Kansas carry Pennsylvania?" And I gave him some advice, and he became—[laughter]—he became President of the United States of America.

The President. That's how it worked. Thank you so much, Arlen. Thank you.

Well, let me start off by just saying I'm thrilled to have Arlen in the Democratic Caucus. I have told him that he will have my full

support in the Democratic primary. Joe Biden has said the same thing. We are confident that Arlen Specter is going to get a sixth term in the Senate, and the American people are going to be better off for it.

I'd like to say a few more things about Arlen, but before I do, I'd like to briefly address the ongoing challenge posed by the H1N1 flu virus.

We are closely and continuously monitoring the emerging cases of this virus throughout the United States. Overnight we also received confirmation that an infant in Texas has died as a result of this virus. And my thoughts and prayers and deepest condolences go out to the family, as well as those who are ill and recovering from this flu.

This is obviously a serious situation, serious enough to take the utmost precautions. Secretary Napolitano, Secretary Sebelius, and our entire team are in close contact with State and local authorities around the Nation. But I would also urge health agencies in local communities to be vigilant about identifying suspected cases of this virus in your areas and reporting them to the appropriate State and Federal authorities in a timely way. We need your assistance.

It's also the recommendation of our public health officials that schools with confirmed or suspected cases of H1N1 should strongly consider temporarily closing so that we can be as safe as possible. If the situation becomes more serious and we have to take more extensive steps, then parents should also think about contingencies if schools in their areas do temporarily shut down, figuring out and planning what their childcare situation would be.

If we ended up having a school closure, a child was sick, just sending a child from the school to a day care center is not a good solution. So we would have to think through, and each parent, I think, would have to think through what options would be available to them in the event that this became more serious.

Yesterday, I also requested from Congress an immediate 1.5 billion in emergency funding. This funding will ensure that we have adequate supplies of vaccines and the equipment

to handle a potential outbreak. It will ensure that these vaccines and equipment get to where they need to go around the country. And it will provide for sufficient planning and preparation at the State and local levels.

And every American should know that the Federal Government is prepared to do whatever is necessary to control the impact of this virus. But there are also steps that Americans can take individually. They're the same steps that you would take to prevent any other flu: Keep your hands washed, cover your mouth when you cough, stay home from work if you are sick, keep your children home from school if they are sick.

I'll continue to get constant updates on the situation from the responsible agencies, and we will continue to offer regular updates to the American people about the steps they need to take and the steps that we are taking. And I can assure you that we will be vigilant in monitoring the progress of this flu and I will make every judgment based on the best science available.

Now, part of the reason we have such an outstanding array of scientists and researchers is because of the tireless efforts of the gentleman standing to my right. Having courageously battled multiple life-threatening diseases of his own—and let me tell you, Arlen Specter is one tough hombre—he has become a champion for public health in this country. He's most recently responsible for the increase in funding for the National Institutes of Health so that it can continue to discover the cures and treatments that will save countless lives.

And that brings me to why we're here today. Today I have the honor of standing next to the newest Democrat from the State of Pennsylvania. I know that the decision Senator Specter made yesterday wasn't easy. It required long and careful consideration, and it required courage. But I know that it also reflects an independence that has been the hallmark of Arlen Specter's career since the days he arrived in Washington. He has never been in the Senate to fight for any particular party, but rather for the men and women of Pennsylvania who sent him here.

And this is also why I don't expect that Senator Specter will agree with every decision I make and support every single one of those policies. I don't accept—I don't expect Arlen to be a rubber stamp; I don't expect any Member of Congress to be a rubber stamp. In fact, I'd like to think that Arlen's decision reflects a recognition that this administration is open to many different ideas and many different points of view, that we seek cooperation and common ground, and that in these 100 days we've begun to move this Nation in the right direction.

As I told Senator Specter yesterday, he has my full support, my full commitment to work with him on those areas where we do agree, areas like health care, education, expanding America's manufacturing base, and medical research. I look forward to working with the Senator on these and other issues in the coming weeks and months. I'm eager to receive his counsel and advice, especially when he disagrees. And I have great respect and admiration for the decision that he has made.

Senator Specter often tells the story about his father, Harry Specter, who came to this country from Russia nearly a century ago. He fought in World War I and was seriously wounded in ac-

tion. Later, he became one of the thousands of veterans who never received the bonus that our Government promised in return for the brave service that they had rendered to our Nation. Many of these veterans would later march on Washington because of that broken promise, and some were shot at by their own Government because they were voicing dissent.

Arlen Specter has said that his career in public service has been one long journey to get his father's bonus. And until he does, he plans to keep on running. It's a metaphor that's particularly apt today as he begins the next chapter in his proud effort to fight for all those men and women who need and deserve a voice in Washington.

And so I'm grateful that he is here. And I'm also grateful that Joe Biden paid him a little attention on the train. [Laughter] Thank you much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 a.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano; and Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius.

Remarks at a Town Hall Meeting and a Question-and-Answer Session in Arnold, Missouri

April 29, 2009

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody please have a seat. Have a seat. Thank you so much. What a wonderful introduction. It's good to be out of Washington, good to be back in the Midwest.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Love you back.

Let me, first of all, ask everybody to give a huge round of applause to Linda for the great introduction and everything that she's been doing in the community. Thank you so much.

I've got a few other friends who are here, you may know them, I want to make sure that I acknowledge them. One of, I think, the finest Members of Congress that we have and somebody who's just been a great friend of mine, she is somebody you want in the foxhole with you

when you got a tough fight. Please give a huge round of applause to Claire McCaskill.

We've got one of the finest new Governors in the country, Jay Nixon. Where did Jay go? There he is. An outstanding secretary of State and somebody who I think may turn out to be pretty good in Washington, if she just so decides, Robin Carnahan. We've got attorney general Chris Koster here; State treasurer Clint Zweifel; a great friend who was with me from the start, Susan Montee, your State auditor. We have our outstanding host today, Mayor Ron Counts of Arnold. We've got Congressman Russ Carnahan, who's voting on the budget today, but I want everybody to give him a big round of applause anyway.

I want to thank everybody here at Fox High School for their hospitality. I want to thank your lovely school superintendent, who is just doing an outstanding job. Please stand up. I want to thank the Warriors for the basketball jersey, which I will wear with pride, although—[applause]—yeah! If I ever get to play basketball again—[laughter]—they’ve been keeping me a little busy.

It is great to be back in the middle of America, where common sense often reigns. And this reminds me of why I like to get out of Washington now and again. Last time I was in Missouri was just under 6 months ago, at a high school a lot like this one. We were in Springfield. It was 2 days before the election, and I was making my final case to the American people. And it was just an unbelievable crowd, bigger than anything anybody had expected. And so we’re here in Missouri to—we were here in Missouri at the end of a long journey to the White House, and so now I want to come back and speak to you at the beginning of another long journey. Today marks 100 days since I took the oath of office to be your President—100 days. It’s a good thing. [Applause] Thank you.

Now, back in November, some folks were surprised that we showed up in Springfield at the end of our campaign. But then again, some folks were surprised that we even started our campaign in the first place. They didn’t give us much of a chance. They didn’t think we could do things differently. They didn’t know if this country was ready to move in a new direction.

But here’s the thing, my campaign wasn’t born in Washington. My campaign was rooted in neighborhoods just like this one, in towns and cities all across America, rooted in folks who work hard and look after their families and seek a brighter children—future for their children and for their communities and for their country. It was driven by workers who were tired of seeing their jobs shipped overseas, their health care costs go up, their dreams slip out of reach. It was grounded in a sense of unity and common purpose with every single American, whether they voted for me on election day or voted for somebody else. It was energized by every citizen who be-

lieved that the size of our challenges had outgrown the smallness of our politics. My campaign was possible because the American people wanted change.

I ran for President because I wanted to carry those voices—your voices—with me to Washington. And—[applause]—so I just want everybody to understand: You’re who I’m working for every single day in the White House. I’ve heard your stories. I know you sent me to Washington because you believed in the promise of a better day. And I don’t want to let you down.

You believed that after an era of selfishness and greed, that we could reclaim a sense of responsibility on Wall Street and in Washington, as well as on Main Street. You believed that instead of huge inequalities and an economy that’s built on a bubble, we could restore a sense of fairness to our economy and build a new foundation for lasting growth and prosperity. You believed that at a time of war, we could stand strong against our enemies and stand firmly for our ideals, and show a new face of American leadership to the world. That’s the change that you believed in. That’s the trust you placed in me. It’s something I will never forget, the fact that you made this possible.

So today, on my 100th day in office, I’ve come back to report to you, the American people, that we have begun to pick ourselves up and dust ourselves off, and we’ve begun the work of remaking America. We’re working to remake America.

Now, we’ve got a lot of work to do, because on our first day in office we found challenges of unprecedented size and scope. Our economy was in the midst of the most serious downturn since the Great Depression. Banks had stopped lending. The housing market was crippled. The deficit was at \$1.3 trillion. And meanwhile, families continued to struggle with health care costs, too many of our kids couldn’t get the education they needed, the Nation remained trapped by our dangerous dependence on foreign oil.

Now, these challenges could not be met with half-measures. They couldn’t be met with the same old formulas. They couldn’t be